

PONTIFICAL JOHN PAUL II THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SCIENCES



The Institute's new courses



PONTIFICO ISTITUTO TEOLOGICO
GIOVANNI PAOLO II
PER LE SCIENZE
DEL MATRIMONIO E DELLA FAMIGLIA

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ LATERANENSE

Introduction

*by Vincenzo Paglia
Grand Chancellor*

In founding the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and the Family Sciences, Pope Francis wished to relaunch his predecessor St. John Paul II's intuition, fully accepting the challenge. In inaugurating the 2016 academic year, while reiterating the choices made by St. John Paul II, Pope Francis wished to provide it with new impetus. This involved growth alongside continuity. Pope Francis said, "the farsighted intuition of Saint John Paul II, who strongly wanted this academic institution, today [may] be better recognised and appreciated for its fruitfulness and timeliness. His wise discernment of the signs of the times restored with vigour the attention of the Church and of human society itself, to the profundity and delicacy of the bonds that are generated from the conjugal alliance of man and woman. The development that the Institute has had in the five Continents confirms the validity and meaning of the "catholic" form of its program. The vitality of this project, which has generated an institution of such high profile, encourages the further development of initiatives of colloquium and exchange with all academic institutions, also those belonging to different religious and cultural areas, which are committed today to reflecting on this most delicate frontier of the human."

His Holiness also added that evidence of the profound humanity and the pure beauty of the Christian ideal of a family should inspire the Institute in even more profoundly. After all, in its evangelising mission, the Church is called upon to dispense God's love for all the families in the world. "The Church – which recognizes herself as family people – sees in the family the icon of the God's covenant with the whole human family. And, in reference to Christ and to the Church, the Apostle affirms that this is a great mystery (cf. *Ephesians* 5:32). Therefore, the charity of the Church commits us to develop – on the doctrinal

and pastoral plane – our capacity to read and interpret, for our time, the truth and the beauty of God’s creative plan. The radiation of this divine project, in the complexity of the human condition, calls for a special intelligence of love. And also a strong evangelical dedication, animated by great compassion and mercy for the vulnerability and fallibility of the love between human beings.”

Three years have now passed since the founding of this new academic institute. This has been a long period of time during which, both in the Institute’s headquarters and its external sessions, a complex and articulate debate was started, involving scientific issues as well as the Institute’s organisation. It was necessary to satisfy in the best possible way Pope Francis’ request, which also invited us to think on a larger scale and with new enthusiasm, so as to return centrality to the alliance between men and women for the world’s development. Finally, we have reached the end of this renewal process. It was a process marked by moments of great convergence, but also by visions that at times differed. At the end of the process, the Holy See’s authorities approved the new Institute’s charter and delivered the new study programmes, the implementation of which must be carried out in the best possible way and with the greatest commitment achievable. We are aware that the Institute is “pontifical” in the best and profoundest sense of the word. The Institute is in fact called upon to support the necessary openness of the intellect of faith within the framework of special services for the pastoral concern of Peter’s Successor, who invites us to urgently nurture a special sensitivity for the enunciation of the Christian mission through frequentation of the human condition. “Good theologians, like good shepherds, have the odour of the people and of the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine onto the wounds of mankind” (March 3rd, 2015). And we are well aware that theology and pastoral care walk hand in hand. A theological doctrine that does not allow itself to be oriented and shaped by the Church’s evangelising objectives and pastoral care, is as unthinkable as pastoral care

unable to treasure the revelation and its tradition, in view of a better understanding and spreading of the faith. This “Catholic” harmonisation of devotion also in all research undertaken, defines the framework of the reorganisation of study plans.

What deserves above all to be acknowledged and appreciated in this new proposal is a dual and precious broadening of the basic courses required for obtaining qualifications, also achieved through the optimisation of the subjects chosen. Specialisation courses have been doubled, as well as theologically and culturally enhanced. An exquisitely theological path (also in determining the juridical value of the qualification itself, planned as an absolutely real qualification in theology) and another involving “marriage and family studies”, which allow for in-depth analysis of the essence of a family form of human life in its complexity, and therefore does not necessarily require a degree in Theology. This last course consists of a programme with a rigorous academic outline, specifically created for lay people, nowadays increasingly involved with an active and also educational role in family pastoral care and in providing support for families.

The more specific articulation of the two courses is supported by a corresponding improvement of education on offer and the commitment to research concerning the basic subjects (the integration of which, already envisaged in a basic programme in both departments, can be further modulated and personalised for individual study plans). The theological aspect also seems enriched and authoritative (having obviously confirmed many of the courses and professors from the previous Institute). Great importance has been assigned to the need for a framework within which, through a suitable optimisation of subject areas, it is possible to undertake a fundamental reflection on the theology of the faith and the Christian form, paying particular attention to human love. Consequently there is also explicit evidence of an in-depth analysis of the faith’s ecclesial and communitarian dimension, in relation to the broader aspects of

the conjugal sacrament for the Church's organisation, mission and pastoral care. As far as the enhancement of the cultural framework of anthropological knowledge and that of social transformations is concerned, this legitimises the introduction of teachings that allow an understanding of the concreteness of the historical experience of families. These include History and Culture of Family Institutions, the Sociology of Marriage and the Family, the Politics and Economics of Families, Canon and Comparative Family Law, Family Spirituality and the passing on of the Faith.

This small book only contains the essays that a number of professors, among the new ones called upon to teach these subjects, have written in recent months in order to express their appreciation and adhesion to the John Paul II's Institute renewed academic proposal. It is a brief introduction to determine the quality of the education proposed, to the advantage of the entire Church and to allow a comprehension of the issues that, within this Institute, are on the daily front lines of its rigorous commitment and passionate devotion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vincenzo Paglia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross at the beginning.

Vincenzo Paglia
Grand Chancellor

Between Faith and Reality

*Approval of the Statutes of the Pontifical John Paul II
Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences.*

*by Pierangelo Sequeri
President*

The contribution of theological research to Christian culture—and to human culture as a whole—cannot be seen only as a principle. The quality of its contribution— of thought and research, of formation and guidance— must be appreciated in practice, in understanding the faith, as well as the reality that faith is able to call forth and spread.

Today, the “principle of reality” must be considered a crucial issue for the seriousness and rigor of “thinking about faith.” The famous Thomistic adage, which boldly directs the inmost knowledge of faith toward the realistic purpose of knowing (*fides non terminatur ad enuntabile sed ad rem*, faith is not directed toward a formulation but rather to a reality) has never been so relevant. The understanding of faith and the understanding of reality live in close symbiosis, or they do not live at all. In this sense, theology does not withdraw in any way from the purpose of its research, which is shedding light on reality—the reality made known by revelation received in faith, culminating in the reality of Jesus Christ, and the reality disclosed in the dynamism of all creation in the world and in human history, both of which, in the Jesus Christ, event recognize their roots in the intimacy of God's love and in the promise of their total redemption in the womb of God. The intimate union of faith and reality, which provides the horizon for a theological ministry that is directed toward uniting the awe-filled contemplation of God's handiwork with the serene joy of evangelizing the human creature, is also the fundamental

axis of the openness to dialogue and of the critical discernment with which theology is active within the various forms of human knowledge about reality and the meaning of things and of life. This orientation, followed openly and transparently, honors the non-ideological, non-self-referential quality of theological endeavor, while still allowing it freedom to remain strictly consistent with the witness to truth that faith commits it to. “The renewal of schools of theology comes about through the practice of discernment and through a dialogical way of proceeding capable of creating a corresponding spiritual environment and intellectual practice..... A dialogue capable of integrating the living criterion of Jesus’ Paschal Mystery with that of analogy, which discover connections, signs, and theological references in reality, in creation and in history.” (Francis, Address to the Theological Faculty of Naples, 21 June 2019).

The approval of the Charter of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences inaugurates and supports the new operational phase of its adaptation to these criteria that inspire the believing intelligence and Christian culture that are required of ecclesial mission in a changed era. The basic outline of this adaptation, together with the coordinated discipline that provides the structure for its institutional operations within the variety of academic forms that, within the Church, are dedicated to the research and formation of Christian thought, were set out in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* of Pope Francis. The possibilities for renewal that have been entrusted specifically to our theological institute are contained in the *Motu proprio Summa familiae cura*, as later expanded upon in the allocutions addressed, at various times, to the leadership and to the entire community of the Institute.

What are the guidelines for renewal that, subsequently, will define the new structure? First, the expansion and strengthening (with new chairs and additional new teachers) of

the two “poles” that give life to the specific mission originally entrusted to the Institute: namely, its theological-pastoral activities and its activities that are anthropological-cultural. The first pole will be substantially expanded through systematic emphasis on deepening the theology of Christian faith, of the ecclesiology of the community and of the Gospel mission, of the anthropology of human and theological love, of the global theological ethics of life, of spirituality and of the transmission of faith in the secular city. The second pole, in particular, will be broadly reshaped to respond to the exigencies involved in updating study and dialogue within Christian culture and thought in the areas of comparative law (religious and civil), of the sociology of economic, political and technological change in the community; of the role of the family in human formation, and in the structure of intermediate bodies concerned with the ethical and affective integration of society.

The two poles will be redesigned in a way that fully harmonizes them within a framework of unified Christian research and formation of the highest level. At the same time, their organization will allow them to pursue specialized curricula leading to degrees in the two distinct areas, with appropriate academic recognition and the possibility of targeted participation within the ecclesiastical and civil institutions of various countries. In this context, a carefully studied selection of complementary courses will also be made available, entrusted to specialists of recognized high standing (at our main campus or affiliated with qualified university departments, particularly at the Pontifical Lateran University, our principal corresponding institution).

The new John Paul II Institute thus intends to honor the profound, and always valid, commitments expressed in the founding traditions that have preceded it, pursuing with ever greater determination the new global role required by its theological and cultural mission. The Institute intends to do this, as a first step, by not only confirming but also by growing,

in quantity and quality, its international capabilities. It will also develop a capacity for inter-communication—theological, cultural and academic—on a global scale, both through the further strengthening its faculty, which will be able to enrich a research community that is entrusted with the mission of interacting, in a spirit of cooperation and without any hint of timidity, with the widest academic horizons and the liveliest intellectual forces; and as well through the establishment of specialized and varied courses of formation, with a view to taking greater advantage of the different approaches and goals of the students, within their local churches and in the light of the Church’s universal mission.

Our hope, obviously, is to win the confidence of the Pastors of the Church and thus to support their ministry to their faith communities in this delicate and strategic aspect of the communication of the Catholic faith and the interpretation of human reality. Our commitment, moreover, intends to honor to the fullest our special title of “Pontifical,” that is, closely linked to the supreme and universal ministry of the successor of Peter. The trust that the Pope Francis has bestowed on us, and in many ways has renewed, is a recognition, and certainly not a secondary one, of our commitment to faithful service to a Church that has been authoritatively encouraged to leave behind any fearful self-referentiality in order to witness to an evangelical truth that is preached with joy. We are convinced, with the humility and firm certainty that our faith gives us, that the Spirit has in store great treasures of wisdom for the Lord’s disciples who are carrying out the mission that will evangelize our present age.

L'Osservatore Romano, 18 July 2019

**Marriage and the family
at the centre of “pastoral conversion” paths**

The teachings of the Church and the increasingly wide gap with
the experiences of many Christians.

A reflection in view of the “re-founding”
of the John Paul II Theological Institute.

by Gilfredo Marengo

Tenured Professor of Theological Anthropology

The Synodal season on the family, started in the autumn of 2013 and completed with the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016) has emphasised two fundamental centres of interest: the emergence of new and previously unknown problems and an increasingly wide rift between ecclesial teachings on marriage and the families and experiences of many Christians. In a cultural and social context in which common feelings are increasingly extraneous to Christian paradigms concerning human beings, love and marriage, even members of the ecclesial community find it hard to understand the reasons for this and, consequently, do not employ them as criteria for life. It is precisely this frailty of the Christian condition that heavily influences the Church’s capacity to successfully address the new issues present in the contemporary world, since the only resource that can be successfully fielded is renewed proof from Christian families.

The real heart of the matter is this: one must acknowledge a clear difference between the uncommon wealth and abundance of ecclesial teachings on these subjects, produced in a unique manner over the past decades, their effective reception in the life of the ecclesial community and an ability to affect the lives of people of our times. It was the Second Vatican Council, especially with the Constitution entitled *Gaudium et Spes*, that resulted in what was almost a “new beginning” for ecclesial

teachings on marriage and the family, thanks to the contents expressed and the decision to bring such issues to the forefront among the “most urgent problems” in the development of its second part. Using the Council’s words one can well say that they were acknowledged as “signs of the times” (GS 4). In the half a century that followed the Council, the ecclesial community progressively identified itself with the Council’s guidance, although this path has not always been linear and without problems.

The role played by *Humanae Vitae* and its complex reception has been decisive. It is no coincidence that these days there are some who - as a pretext – see the re-founding of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and the Family Sciences, wanted by Pope Francis, as yet another episode in an exhausting and tedious controversy concerning the document by Paul VI. The characteristics of a “Stone Guest” in this pontifical text, operative for all these decades, depend on factors going well beyond the contents of its teaching and are clearly visible when one analyses the investment that John Paul II made on the subjects of marriage and the family, paying special attention to an in-depth reception of that encyclical. It is sufficient to remember the singular corpus of the catechesis on human love (1979-1984) and the founding of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family (1981).

Humanae Vitae had profoundly marked the last decade of the Montini papacy, considered by many one of the most acute emergencies of the first post-Council season. According to the Pope “come from afar”, resuming responsibility for teachings was necessary, not only to offer more adequate theological foundations, but also to assist the ecclesial community to exit the marshlands of divisive theological controversies that had significantly affected pastor care and action in the world. Reaching a doctrinal “peace” was considered necessary to accompany and support the change of pace that John Paul II

intended to imprint on the Church's life, hence the proclamation of the absolute novelty of the Christian event and its capacity to withstand all history's and the world's provocations, in a context that he saw dramatically marked by an epoch-making "controversy over the humanum."

Echoes of this concern are well expressed in the *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), above all when the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* are reiterated with a degree of solemnity and theologians are addressed and invited to continue an in-depth analysis of all that is proposed, warning them to never back away from a "convinced adherence to the Magisterium, which is the one authentic guide for the People of God." (FC no. 31).

Many years later, an authoritative formalisation of this path was provided with the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (August 15th, 1993), "concerning fundamentals of the Church's role in moral teaching." This document evoked a significant part of the conflictingly received *Humanae Vitae*, when observing that "within the context of the theological debates which followed the Council, there have developed *certain interpretations of Christian morality which are not consistent with "sound teaching" (2 Tim 4:3)*, with the intention of "*clearly setting forth certain aspects of doctrine which are of crucial importance in facing what is certainly a genuine crisis.*"

At times an interpretive criteria, according to which *Humanae Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor* "simul stabunt aut simul cadunt", was proposed so as to preserve the "truth" on Christian life and the Church's presence in the world. At times this has resulted in family pastoral care with special emphasis on the use of natural birth control methods, assigning it the role of a litmus test for families' full ecclesial belonging. Without detracting from the importance of this aspect of the conjugal experience, it is quite clear that the specific Christianity of the family possesses a horizon and a complexity that cannot be reduced only to the moral criteria of exercising fatherhood and motherhood.

Set in its own time, the magisterium of John Paul II loses none of its originality and authoritativeness, but allows the emergence of a number of misunderstandings concerning the manner in which it was received and divulged. Its reception was conditioned by the fact that, for decades, siding for or against *Humanae Vitae* at times coincided with radical choices and was seen as the necessary and prior verification of powerful identity profiles in the Church. This improvidently encouraged two extreme attitudes: a prejudicial rejection of his teachings or an unconditional defence of them, which provided them with the disproportionate role of being the definitive bastion at every sign of a crisis in the Church and in the world.

It is for these reasons that it was not possible to fully enhance the proposal made by John Paul II to radically overcome the theology of marriage's "two objectives" (procreative and unifying), a totally new element in his teachings that questioned one of the more traditional elements of ecclesial teaching on this subject. Similar observations can also be made regards to the attempt, clearly set out in Catechesis, to enact a clear downsizing of the natural register, integrated in the context of Biblical anthropology. It is in fact up to the so-called "theology of the body" to prove the universal pertinence of a Christian understanding of marital acts of love, thereby achieving a dual advantage: the full valorisation of the revealed fact and the overcoming of an objectivistic and existentialist argumentation. The magisterium of the "Family's Pope" really seemed almost innovative when compared to all that theological reflection had so far stated. It is equally clear that the undisputed new elements can be promoted in all their significance only on condition they do not become a conclusive and defined doctrinal corpus protected from all attempts involving in-depth analysis and critical comparisons.

It is difficult to seize the methodological novelty present in *Amoris Laetitia* without identifying with this opinion: "We also

need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism." (Apostolic Exhortation 36). Francis now considers it essential to correct a consideration of pastoral care, which, is however – by default or by excess – established in comparison to doctrine. What is suggested is a "decentralisation" of the doctrinal element, without this in any way disregarding the entire preservation of the *depositum fidei*, almost informally allowing an improbable dogmatic relativism and an Irenicist view of the current historical period.

The appeal for a "pastoral conversion", in view of a "missionary transformation of the Church" (*Apostolic Exhortation* 20-33), could only achieve that reappraisal of the doctrinal register and the role played by the pontifical magisterium. It is no coincidence that the Pope has specifically addressed a "conversion of the Papacy" (*Apostolic Exhortation* 32), pertinent not to its constitutive profile, but the manner in which it is exercised.

In such a context new possibilities appear for achieving a better awareness of the new light that the Christian event shines on human love, marriage and the family. It was quite hard for this to become part of ecclesial language and work for as long as the perception of this reality was, in various ways, conditioned by other problems, such as Church-World conflicting relationship, in which it seemed necessary to invest in the ecclesial body's compactness around the Pope, challenging the "world" on the universal playing field of reason and nature, in an exhausting conflict between humankind and society's two models, the secular and the Christian one.

Nowadays instead, it is Christians who are provoked to address the difficult condition in which many nowadays risk their own freedom in sentimental relationships; the conditioning linked to

the current historical period is no small thing, but it is all the more necessary to keep alive the promise of a possible asset and a good life. Having purified consideration of the family of all problem-causing excesses, it deserves to be presented as an “opportunity” for everyone. Moving beyond a tendency to invest in an ideal image of the family, allows one to hold together the certainty of faith in God’s plan for the life of humankind (God’s dream) – of which the family is an integral part – and being able to acknowledge that fully adhering to that project also includes the experience of mistakes and frailty. It is precisely within the area of distances and conflict that each is once again given a chance to experience the closeness of God, who never abandons his children (See Francis, Speech made at Festival of Families, Philadelphia, September 26th, 2015).

Unburdened of excessive ballast, ecclesial care for marriage and the family – the dominant subjects in the life of the Church in recent decades – can nowadays calmly enhance at its best all the work done during the Sixties, and, elicited by current “changing times”, commit with energy and gusto in showing all the capability that the Christian novelty has in accompanying every human being in risking their freedom within the great “job” of life and love.

This renewed pastoral style raises difficult questions and provocations for theological reflection. It is to be hoped that, in view of a clear reappraisal of doctrinal instances, study and scientific research will recover their entire original profile that cannot be reduced to being a mere platform for the ecclesiastic magisterium. It should instead be reiterated that the study and teaching of theology has no meaning if not that of cooperating with the Church’s life and mission, since it is called upon to offer a “valuable contribution of thought and reflection that examine, in the deepest and most rigorous way, the truth of the revelation and wisdom of the tradition of faith, in view of its better comprehension at the present time.” (*Summa familiae cura*).

As far as the subjects most in need of in-depth analysis are concerned, it is sufficient to bear in mind here how necessary it is to bring to the forefront the revealed novelty of the sacrament of marriage. Already in 1969, a young Joseph Ratzinger understood the frailty of observing marriage as limited to the framework of natural law, but also those of a widespread “personalistic” interpretation of the experience of human love (For a theology of marriage, Italian translation, Venice 2018 [or in German, 1969]), with an invitation to invest in the singularity of the “sacredness” of Christian marriage, to be considered far more than the “elevation” of the “natural” one according to post Council of Trent vocabulary.

Moving in this direction it is possible to correct the excessively rigid manner in which the relationship between anthropology and morals has been investigated, in which all too often the first appears as a “theoretical” premise aimed at legitimising the second to occupy the entire field of pastoral care and practical support. At a time in which marriage and the family were considered a particularly sensitive area in Church-world relations, to be addressed above all using the instruments of ethics, anthropological paradigms were privileged, capable of holding together the novelty/singularity of the Christian message and its being “for everyone”, hence capable of real universal adhesion. Changed historical and cultural conditions and the current confused plurality of anthropological figures have introduced a significant number of problems, since it has become almost impossible to identify a truly representative interlocutor. The centuries-old investment in categories such as “reason” or “nature” now appears highly inadequate.

By instead exerting leverage on the missionary vocation of Christians and communities, it is possible to reduce the scope of these problems. This means first of all establishing a dialogue with the image humankind nowadays has of itself, in the light of a Christian anthropological model, but also seeing it within the

real contexts in which it exists, be they good or bad. It is necessary to actively manifest the ecclesial community's ability to accompany human love, in all the historical expressions, dimensions and circumstances in which it takes place during the lives of the men and women of our times.

La Stampa, 30 July 2019

The Family, Reasons for Change

The reason for which it has been considered urgent
to broaden the plan of studies to social sciences ·

by *Vincenzo Rosito*

*Tenured professor of History and Culture of Family
Institutions*

The recent approval of the Statutes and Plan of Studies of the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences is an important opportunity for reflecting on the nature and tasks of ecclesiastic studies. The central and particular objective of the new Institute is to broaden the range of studies on the family, wholeheartedly promoting an increasingly intense and fecund dialogue between theology and human and social science. Contrary to some restrictive and limiting interpretations, the particular perspective of moral theology is not excluded, nor is it sacrificed in favour of a sociological shift of the educational path. Loyal to John Paul II's original inspiration and the renewed pastoral impulse that Pope Francis wishes to implement, the new Institute's Study Programme turns the need to integrate and broaden scientific perspectives on family life into an educational opportunity. In his *motu proprio* "*Summa Familiae Cura*", the new academic institution's founding document, Pope Francis formulates a particularly significant and urgent invitation, "We must be informed and impassioned interpreters of the wisdom of faith in a context in which individuals are less well supported than in the past by social structures, and in their emotional and family life."

In virtue of these words, so-called "pastoral challenges" or "educational emergencies" neither discourage nor harden the hearts of believers, but authorise God's people to become the *Veritatis Gaudium* promoters of authentic "hermeneutic" feats. The entire Christian community can therefore legitimately

perceive itself as a historical community that interprets the world and the social realities it belongs to. Academic institutions, therefore, do not have the monopoly of the Christian hermeneutics of present time, but exercise a particular cultural and educational diaconia, supporting the steps taken by the faithful and interpreting people of God. This perspectival vision emerges clearly in the Institute's Plan of Studies and the criteria adopted in the creation of new chairs and teachings. All this is clearly in line with the hopes expressed in the foreword of the Apostolic Constitution: to work so that ecclesiastic studies become "a sort of providential cultural laboratory in which the Church carries out the performative interpretation of the reality brought about by the Christ event."

That of a cultural laboratory is a particularly effective image for the reorganisation of the tasks of academic institutions and in particular those of a theological institution specialised in the study of marriage and the family. Firstly, the laboratorial dimension calls upon theology understood not only as wisdom, but as practice. The linguistic-discursive mediation of theology demands loyalty to reciprocal learning between multiple interlocutors since it cannot be restricted to adhesion to a thought matured in solitude.

An effective theological laboratory on the family can therefore become a "providential cultural laboratory" not only by broadening the range of subjects useful in studying this subject. Every real cultural laboratory authorises practices and gestures of proximity towards a living and vital reality such as the family itself. A performative interpretation of reality is a practical task, capable of involving and transforming those who take part in it. More precisely, a performative interpretation of social reality encourages people to acknowledge the importance of conjugal-family mediation. Fatherhood, motherhood, children and siblings edify the humanity we share, while at the same time differentiate it culturally. It is for this reason and because of the call for a performative interpretation of reality that theology is

now open to a privileged and fruitful dialogue with social sciences, hopefully looking to the vast and multidisciplinary world of which sociology is a particular and partial element. Social philosophy and cultural studies could be just a few among the many different outlooks we need so as to interpret “the destiny of humankind not just as mere individuals, but as members of a community.” (Max Horkheimer).

The science of marriage and the family must thus be oriented and organised by distinctly allowing the emergence of shared relations between religious practices and human ones. It is precisely the “shared” element, understood as an alternative paradigm to rigid public/private opposition that nowadays plays a crucial role in the performative interpretation of family realities. The family, in fact, can never be totally identified with the many “problems” affecting and afflicting it. When the confused vitality of what is shared comes into contact with the sphere of family relations, there is a reawakening of new and unexpected energies. When the social importance of family mediation is not compressed within the ranks of private and proprietary relations, new resources of sociality and participation emerge, as do bursts of solidarity as well as yearnings for involvement for the edification of the humana communitas.

Avvenire, 30 July 2019

Demanding Urgencies

The new challenges faced by the Pontifical John Paul II
Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences

by Manuel Jesús Arroba Conde
Director of the Legal Research Area

While the Law is a means for protecting and promoting human and humanising qualities of the most significant interpersonal and social relations, there is no doubt that Family Law must be included in the list of fundamental contents included in the new qualification in “Marriage and Family Science.” The same applies to Canon Law, if seen as a means that facilitates Christian life and the effective implementation of the only binding rule, the “*norma missionis*”. The promotion of a good family experience, also with suitable and effective ecclesial rules, is the central node of evangelisation, as is taught by the Church’s permanent magisterium. Therefore, having sufficient knowledge of various national and supranational laws concerning the family, as well as greater knowledge of Canon Law, appears to be indispensable for fruitful pastoral work aimed at families.

It is not, however, the juridical knowledge to be acquired that is the main justification for this renewed interest in Family Law. As with all other scientific approaches to reality, especially at degree and doctorate level of ecclesiastic studies, a critical and constructive awareness of the juridical aspects of the family as an institution must also be acquired, which instantly reveals the existence of significant shortcomings and new areas of study. There are, on this subject three issues that deserve a mention.

The first concerns the need to enrich Family Law, reassessing its public aspects. This means overcoming the excessive reduction of its contents to the private legal sphere with its traditional (albeit unavoidable) thematic concerning filiation, parental

authority, inheritance, education and other similar issues as well as, of course, marriage. Such a consideration does not undermine the equally pressing importance that nowadays has been assumed, especially from a canonical viewpoint, by judicial issues concerning family life and above all interpersonal relations between its members (starting with those between married couples), as well as those concerning the spiritual aspect of the union. Further efforts are, however, required to ensure that “Family Law” is also “the law of the family”. This demands studying the laws on social and economic policies that have a greater effect on family life, such as attention paid to the more vulnerable: minors, the elderly, the sick ...

Starting over from the family, in the juridical sense, would imply being equipped with means needed to encourage state family law to be considered the reference parameter for assessing the suitability of rules linked to other judicial elements such as fiscal laws, health laws, labour laws, education laws, as well as those regulating aid to be provided to those taking care of people who are not self-sufficient. The existential impact of such sectorial legislation on the family’s stability and unity could then become the criteria and the critical instance, in line with the objective of allowing families to play their irreplaceable role as social capital. This is the perspective of the Charter of the Rights of the Family, issued in 1983 by the Pontifical Council for the Family, which presented itself to the ecclesial and international community as a “prophetic appeal in favour of the institution of the family” and as a “guide for the *drawing up of legislation and family policy*” that would include a family’s right to live a dignified life, to have a non-disruptive organisation of work, the right to a decent home and to reunification in cases involving families of migrants.

In order to do this one must use clear empiric instruments and not make do with initiatives based only on goodwill. Hence greater juridical competence is required, supported by interdisciplinary analyses regarding the reality of the family. It

is only from reliable analyses that really useful legislative strategies will emerge and be really helpful for promoting adequate family law.

A second important question, within the context of Canon Law, is the need to overcome the excessive “matrimonialisation” of the Church’s laws on family matters. To the risk of an impoverishment of the theology of the family, excessively reduced to a theology of marriage (and often centred only on moral aspects), one must add an insufficient canonical approach. Greater attention is in fact required regarding the canonical subjectivity of the family, deriving from the concept that sees it as the domestic church, as well as the formulation of the “*bonum familiae*” as a juridical concept, of which it will be necessary to study the contents and relevance as far as the validity of marriage is concerned. The juridical subjectivity of the family has specific applications in the context of religious education, but also in the ministry it has outside the home and in favour of the entire community. This consists in promoting and supporting, at least at a testimonial level, the quality of interpersonal relations between husband and wife, parents and children, between families. It includes the protection of weaker families, being close to those are experiencing exception suffering, welcoming families experiencing problems, encouraging those hesitating to do so, to show trusting commitment. There is also the need to provide adequate support for those whose marriage has failed. On this point it is important to observe and promote an associative phenomenon, studying the experiences of family movements and associations.

A third challenge for the study of a juridical dimension for families consists in legislative pluralism and the consideration that, on this subject, it deserves the evolution of legislation, now increasingly distant from the only evangelical ideal of a family, founded in marriage between a man and a woman. It appear necessary to study the juridical importance of non-matrimonial sentimental unions, wondering up to what point one could

apply all that has emerged in the doctrine of John Paul II's magisterium concerning the so-called "imperfect laws" concerning issues linked to bio-law. The emergencies now faced by the judicial authorities in many countries are highly diversified and it is from these that the need to analyse in-depth the judicial aspects of other subjects also emerges. These include the concept of the "supreme interest of the minor", an essential subject linked to legislation on adoption and other family controversies.

L'Osservatore Romano, 11 October 2019

The Family is the Evangelical Way of Considering the World

· The John Paul II Institute's Ecclesiological Outlook

by Giovanni Cesare Pagazzi

Tenured Professor of Ecclesiology and the Family Community

Honouring Pope Francis' mandate, who in his *motu proprio Summa familiae* created the new Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences, Academic Authorities have drafted and seen approved by the Holy See its Statutes and Plan of Studies. A number of recent articles in the Italian press have criticised the new plan of studies, which, in their opinions, is excessively oriented towards sociology. The fact that such observations are hasty and biased is also proved by the fact that among the more evident new elements, already pointed out by the dean, Monsignor Pierangelo Sequeri, on the pages of *L'Osservatore Romano*, there is the really significant amount of space reserved to dogmatic theology in general and more specifically to ecclesiological theology. On the other hand, when speaking of "the special ecclesial profile of the family", Pope Francis had explicitly stated in his *motu proprio* that it is "decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church."

Ecclesiological interest in the family has, of course, obvious reasons. How can one forget that families and their homes were the first places in which Christian communities existed and they continue to be the main context for the dissemination of life and the faith? It is no coincidence that families are known as "small churches" and that the Church is often called a "family", the sacrament of the whole of humankind that consists of God's complex, dramatic and magnificent family.

It is possible, however, that the intentions of those who set out the study programmes for the Institute are far more original,

well supported and courageous. It is not a question of considering the family as an "allegory" of the Church, nor of presenting it as a warm emotional reserve that balances the rigour of ecclesial institutions or the intense rhythm of ordinary pastoral work. Rather it is intended to show the "family-church" ellipse as Christian ontology, the evangelical way of considering the world. And this is because bonds with people and things, of which the family is the result and origin, and their often obscure sensory and affective interweaving, are not corollaries of being, but are being. They are not secondary additions to reality, but reality itself, its power and its shape, its energy and its possible justness. Bonds are the flesh of the world and families are the flesh of bonds. Understanding the world in a discarnate manner means stripping it, mortifying it, forcing it into a cage of lifeless concepts, rules, projects and models (also sociological one). The field of forces and forms activated by the "family-Church" ellipses is the Christian ontology because it is the exquisitely evangelical way of experiencing bonds. It is the Christian explanation of the world and of its evangelical deployment. It is not without reason that the fullness of the Body of Christ will seamlessly consist of the Church and of all things (Eph. 1, 22-23). The Church is destined to all (all!) things, all that constitutes the flesh of the world; nothing less. This is her effort and her pride, her mission and her reward. So the bonds of which families consist are the flesh of the Church, the necessary alphabet if one intends to speak to the world, destined sooner or later to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit, by his incomprehensible attention and surprising power. Who knows what the world could do if inhabited by Christ's Spirit? The Church has the power and the duty to answer this question. She will succeed to the extent that she does not become separated from her flesh, hence from the bonds with people and things that are the texture of every family (even the most complicated ones) and the whole of reality.

This is why it is necessary for an academic institute destined to investigate the reality of families, among other things, to

promote an ecclesiological point of view. Otherwise the Church would risk being unable to meet Jesus' eyes and to evangelise the flesh, saving it from its dramatic, mortal weakness, but also capable of seizing the Gospel that already quivers within it.

L'Osservatore Romano, 27 July 2019

The New Interpretation of Tradition for Current Times

The Renewal of the John Paul II
Pontifical Theological Institute
by *Maurizio Chiodi*
Tenured Professor of Bioethics

It is reductive to consider the Church in merely sociological terms, just as it is simplistic to make comparisons between popes. Of course this does not mean that the style and shape of each Papacy does not present specific traits and meaningful differences. Similarly, all this does not mean that the Church can avoid complex relationship dynamics, appropriately diversified pastoral orientations and legitimately different theological models. The truth of the *forma ecclesiae* lies in its unceasing reference to the salvific event of the Lord Jesus, which is the eschatological fulfilment of the covenant between God and mankind. And the Church is called to this immutable faithfulness to God, through historical changes and the cultural diversity that is her own. Her “stability” (faithfulness) cannot therefore be viewed as the objectivization of a truth that is abstract and disincarnated from history’s ordeals, but rather she bears witness to the evidence of a transcendent gift that is the reason for her existence, precisely through these events.

These are the theological reasons for which it is implausible and misleading to consider the current changes to the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences along the lines of a “reckoning”, or “purges” and obscure “power struggles”. The manifest renewal of this Institute is plainly evident in the reorganisation of its Programme of Studies, which clearly expresses the symphonic contribution that theological sciences are now called to develop in relation to matters of “special ethics”, especially those referring to marriage and the family, i.e. biblical and systematic

theology, practical theology and anthropological knowledge. All these disciplines contribute to forming the theological intelligence of the faith, each with its own original profile and according to a unitary, systematic and rigorous intention.

In this context, moral theology as a whole requires a “necessary updating”, that must treasure its rich tradition while providing it with a new interpretation for current times. This difficult task requires resolving two alternatives. On the one hand, there are theologians and believers who view moral theology as objectified - even more than objective — knowledge that is immutable and owes nothing to historical and cultural experience, as if it were solely devoted to establishing what is lawful and what is unlawful, what is permitted and what is forbidden: the “cold bureaucratic morality” mentioned in *Amoris laetitia* (no. 312), with a fortunate turn of phrase. On the other side, there are other theologians and believers who accept to be exposed to the risk of subjectivisation and to a relativism that transforms the individual will into an indisputable arbitrator of the truth and that, at the same time relativizes the faith in merely cultural terms. Moral theology today therefore faces a twofold fundamental challenge: to avoid essentialism and intellectualist objectivism, without however accepting an interpretation that voids the truth of goodness, emphasizing the idea of a reduced conscience in individualistic terms. Both options, apparently opposite to each other, present the same flaw and share the same assumption. Indeed, beyond their deceitful opposition, both sub-determine that moral knowledge, or moral theology, is the rigorous study of the Christian faith in its practical form and that this has inescapable historical, cultural and relational value.

Moral theology’s purpose is to consider the practical form of the faith, in the “fulfilled time” (see Mk 1:15) announced by the gospel of Jesus. Hence it is fair to say that faith cannot be reduced to ethics because it is the trusting recognition of the

God's free initiative in history and, however, implies a founding moral form, because man's action is the necessary and free response to the event of grace. Originally, therefore, there were God's benefits and in the end the ultimate fulfilment, realised in the story of Jesus and actualised in the Church thanks to the gift of the Spirit: in the midst there is the human drama, with its choices, relationships and circumstances, inseparably marked by the promise of good and the threat of evil

The matters we have summarised above are in the background of the theoretical problems that also concern the great issues of the family, considered in its founding relationship with the Church and the contemporary world. On these matters, Popes have repeatedly spoken out over the past century, placing themselves within a rich millenary tradition. In particular, starting with the Council, *Gaudium et spes*, then Saint Paul VI's *Humanae vitae*, Saint John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio* and *Veritatis splendour* and then *Amoris laetitia* by Francis are some of the documents through which the Popes, as heads of the College of Bishops, have authoritatively expressed their moral magisterium, taking into account the different times and renewed pastoral duties. Opposing these documents means betraying them. One of the duties of theological-moral intelligence is to think of them as a whole, in the perspective of one single truth that is expressed in the practical complexity of situations and circumstances, thus meeting the challenges posed by present times. In the context of moral life, theology's task is not to create fences or moats, but to think of the practical form of the Christian faith in the light of the ecclesiastic magisterium's authoritative documents, so that the gift of grace may still today bear witness in the splendour of its truth.

L'Osservatore Romano, 4 September 2019

The Challenge of Transmitting the Faith Inside the Family

*by Andrea Ciucci
Lecturer at the Institute*

The question of transmitting faith within the family is at the intersection of a crucial series of issues and, for this reason, it is especially important, even and above all in an academic programme that accepts the challenge of a complex and comprehensive understanding of the family experience. The many questions involved may be organised around four main points.

How does one become a Christian?

The evangelical tale answers this question by indicating the encounter with Jesus, experienced by adult men and women, as the paradigm for welcoming the gift of faith that generates conversion and devotion. However, already in the Acts of the Apostles, the question expands, precisely because the power of the family experience emerges. And so there have been many conversions of pagans who, thanks to the Apostles' preaching, came to the faith and were baptised together with all their family members, children included. The way in which one becomes a Christian is not meaningless in terms of the way in which life as a believer develops for each individual; it is one thing to convert as an adult, freely welcoming the gift of life-changing grace, and quite another to be introduced to Christian life through a "mother's milk", that nourishes and prepares for life. The educational processes, initiatory and mystagogical dynamisms, the place of the conversion experience (necessary in any case for those who have always lived in a Christian environment) and the ways in which the natural anthropological and existential (during adolescence above all) and pathological crises are handled are all different. In the *societas christiana*, transmission

of faith in the family is the normal way in which one accesses Christianity, relegating adult conversion to exceptional cases: the transmission of faith thus becomes part of a broader package that is handed down with a founding role in the entire human experience in a given society, with all the good it offers and the evident limits it displays.

What is specific to the family form

Precisely because it is always anchored to an evangelical announcement in the testimonial form, transmission of faith is not indifferent to the context, the individuals and the relationships within which such transmission takes place. There is, therefore, an urgent need to reflect on the specific quality of transmission of faith within the family environment compared to other forms of announcement. It is immediately obvious that preaching and education do not play a central role, although some western efforts relating to the so-called family catechesis experience tend to go in this direction. Faith is passed on above all through the gradual introduction of young children to the adults' practice of faith and thus refers more to the code of sharing experience than teaching; for the first few months of life one might even refer to a non-verbal form of transmission of faith.

The question of the specificity of the transmission of faith also requires being specified and expressed through the classical pair *fides quae fides qua*: what does a family of believers offer the children who believe? What attitudes and content? What are the outcomes of Christianity announced in the family, in a necessarily childish form? Which traits of the Christian experience does this form enhance, which are dangerously at risk?

To answer these questions it is impossible to avoid analysing the concrete forms, places, gestures, words and choices by which the transmission of faith takes place daily and exceptionally in the family. Above all, it is impossible to avoid the defining

environment in which all this takes place: an emotional and reliable relationship. The fact that many of the words through which the Christian experience is expressed are family-derived (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the ecclesial fraternity, the mother Church ...) indicates that the quality of this experience is decisive in relation to the results of the announcement of the Gospel.

Though basically linked to the dimension of exchanges between generations, it is important not to forget that the transmission of faith in the family may also involve spouses: what can conjugal love contribute to the display of the credibility of the experience of faith?

The crisis of the *societas cristiana* and its consequences

The answer to the aforementioned questions can be useful for reiterating with some order the current complexity of the transmission of faith in the family in the European Churches and in all the environments marked by evident secularisation. The fragmentation of the social fabric, up to a few decades ago also based on the shared Christian experience even if simply a shared ethos, is especially obvious when parents no longer transmit any faith, since they themselves are the first to be distant from any connection to faith. This discontinuity emerges first in the crucial existential form rather than in the habit of some initiatory gestures, required in any case at times of Christian communities out of cultural habit or compelled by previous generations (where the current non-secondary role of grandparents in the Christian announcement is obvious). It is not unimportant that nowadays families today are often only capable of announcing a substantial faith in human life and the partial hostility of the future; these are some of the essential contents of the act of generation entrusted to the newborn, for having been generated.

The consequences on Christian communities' pastoral care of this interruption in the transmission of faith in the family are nowadays evident in some environments, although often still incapable of changing a pastoral practice that bases the completion of children's Christian initiation on the assumption that the Gospel has been announced in the family.

The decisive question of inculturation

The family form of transmission of faith, in fact, significantly addresses some of the decisive questions relating to the necessary inculturation of the experience of faith.

A correct and appropriate phenomenology of the forms of transmission of faith in the family environment that takes into account the more diverse and disparate cultures, in which it takes place, can only be particularly fruitful and surprising. It provides, and safeguards, the necessary plurality of the unique Christian experience, as clearly indicated in the programmatic and decisive point 3 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

On the other hand, the fact that the evangelical announcement takes place alongside a more comprehensive initiation to life in a specific culture and social form, while on the one hand it powerfully affirms that faith refers exactly to concrete life, on the other it runs the risk of downplaying the critical function the Gospel has (in respect of every human experience, always and in any case marked by sin, and the consequent appeal to personal and community conversion. This is especially evident in the ideological interpretations that sadly at times emerge in different ways in the more diverse areas of the world. The experience of faith learnt from one's first breath is reduced to a cultural element that characterises different societies: religion runs the risk of being a separating identity marker rather than an opportunity for the Kingdom of God to be disclosed in history.

How Can Family Economics Be Re-founded?

By Matteo Rizzolli

Professor of Politics and Economics of Family Institutions

The reasons for intertwining the thread of economic considerations with the complex fabric of the family institution are many. They stem from the word “economics” itself, the Greek root of which flourishes specifically in the home and in the family environment: the word οἶκος (*oikos*) indicates both the “home” and the “family” and the word νόμος (*nomos*) indicates the “law”. “Oikonomia” originally had to do with the rules governing home life and, hence, decisions involving the family. The etymological proximity of family and economics should not be surprising; up to the modern age, goods and services were mostly produced and used in the family environment, without therefore ever being mediated by the market. Things are different today. After the industrial revolution, families were left at best with the task of providing love, while the time of adult family members is traded on the labour market with salaries intended for the purchase of material goods and services produced by businesses. The family is often relegated to the limited space of an apartment and to the little time the adults are able to carve out from their jobs and the children from their activities, while the economic sphere monopolises the lives, ambitions and meaningful horizons of individuals.

And just as the space taken over by economic relations has hugely expanded to the point of absorbing the large majority of human relations, economics, as an academic discipline, has over these past decades become the imperialist science that has devoured the other social sciences. For some time now economists have been going well beyond the perimeter of studying the workings of businesses and markets and are now studying matters that border with psychology and behavioural

sciences, the economics of crime, the economics of culture and religions and so on. And, of the many subjects that might at first sight appear to be far from the economists' sphere of interest, economic science has in recent years returned to its roots, once again considering the family.

Nobel laureate Gary Becker hugely contributed to the success of a series of economic studies known as family economics by publishing in 1981 his famous "A Treatise on the Family". Becker and the other authors in this series supported a radical project: it was a matter of using microeconomics' founding and deeply utilitarian assumptions concerning the optimising behaviour of individuals (individuals maximise their own utility), the stability of their choices (individuals are capable of judging for themselves what is best for them) and the market's ability to produce an efficient balance to explain individual decisions concerning the decision to form a family, enter into marriage, procreation decisions and those concerning their children's education as well as divorce. So, the homo oeconomicus is no longer faced with consumption choices, but rather with far more demanding life choices.

Becker's treatise presents economic models that predict the distribution of work between the two spouses (wife at home husband at work) as a result of the biological differences between the two genders; prediction of the efficient "matching" potentially achievable on the marriage "market", and predictions that sound rather bizarre in terms of common sense against the ban on polygamy. Becker considers divorce as the consequence of asymmetries in information on the marriage market and the demand for children is determined by costs, the mother's opportunities on the labour market and in human capital investments in children; thus, the drop in the birth rate is explained by the growing involvement of women in the labour market and the increasing costs of educating one's children, and so on and so forth.

This line of research has gradually become more robust and is nowadays a respected tradition in a great many western universities and, as such, informs public debate on issues concerning the family. The cultural project of this initial wave of family economics is undoubtedly steeped in individualism and consequentialism and the regulatory implications that concern – for instance – family law, labour law and public policies generally, often go against the indications provided by Christian teaching. But precisely because of its growing relevance and impact on public policies, family economics can no longer be ignored, but should, rather, be countered specifically using the instruments of economic science. The cultural battle to “re-found” family economics can be launched from three main bastions

To start with, current microeconomics is no longer the one of Gary Becker’s days. Behavioural and experimental economics now tell us that people are cooperative animals who often do not act out of self-interest, but, on the contrary, are capable of heroic actions and altruism; they follow a deontological and not just an instrumental logic, they care about what is right and not just what is useful and are capable of thinking in terms of “us” and not just “me”. The *homo oeconomicus* has become humanised and, based on these new theoretical assumptions, the development of an economic theory according to which individuals are capable of rationally supporting alliances that can last over time and are aimed at caring for others, inside and outside the family circle, no longer appears to be all that unlikely.

In recent decades, economic theory has embarked on a new empirical direction and studies on the family institution are based on data that paint a picture supporting the soundness of the classical anthropological family model, shared also by the Christian vision. Dozens of studies have shown that, compared to singles and couples just living together, married couples enjoy better physical and mental health, have a longer life

expectancy, a higher index of financial wellbeing and personal wellbeing etc. Children who grow up in within a stable lasting family, ratified by marriage, in turn enjoy significant benefits in terms of objective and subjective wellbeing compared to those who grow up outside of such families, and these are life-long effects. Empirical studies are also unanimous in underlining that a family “split-up” is the single most important cause underlying serious problems affecting children and that range from dropping out of school to suicide. As they say, the figures are stubbornly telling us that the family according to the Christian idea is a model that should be taken as an example, first and foremost because it is good for its members.

One final strong point on which to base new family economics is the contribution provided by the Czech economist Lubomír Mlčoch, a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, who in 2017 published a book with the San Paolo publishing house, called “Family economics. How the family can save the heart of the economy”. Using an approach based on neo-institutionalist analysis, Mlčoch convincingly outlines a theory of *vertical de-integration of the family institution*, in continuous competition with the market and, for the moment, on the losing side.

This long-term process has basically been through three stages: the first stage, that followed the industrial revolution, in which the family gradually transferred to the market its role as a centre of production of consumer goods, but also of a complex network of relationships, benefits and symbolism associated to it. The second stage, which began after WWII with the massive entry of women into the labour market, saw activities such as preparing food, looking after the house and, above all, family’s members who were not self-sufficient, transferred to the market or to public service. Lastly, the third stage in which the most specific goods produced by the family have been transferred to the market, i.e. the children themselves. The availability and accessibility of contraceptives and assisted fertilisation techniques, the decreasing cost of abortion and the new

frontiers opened up by the manipulation and oocyte and gamete cryopreservation, surrogate pregnancy, and the not-too-distant horizon of human cloning for medical purposes, are more and more commodifying human life itself. Acquiring awareness of this process, studying and disseminating it is a first step that has become necessary for all scholars or simply men of good will who are keen for a change of direction.

It is precisely to return a human face to economics and economic science, that the Supreme Pontiff has convened an international meeting of young scholars and economic operators to be held in Assisi from April 26th to April 28th, 2020. And it is specifically to develop family economics according to Christian humanism, that the chair of *Political Economics of the Family Institution* has been established at the John Paul II Pontifical Institute.

The Path of the John Paul II Theological Institute

· Theology and the Ecclesial Mission·

by Carlo Casalone

*Member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Moral Theology
Professor at Pontifical Gregorian University*

Pope Francis is promoting a renewal of the life of believers and it concerns all the dimensions of the ecclesial community and touches on all areas of the Church's life. Although the importance that the Pope attaches to theology is often underestimated, in actual fact he cares deeply about earnestness and rigour in understanding the faith experience. Francis has repeatedly underlined the need for theological analysis to be structurally developed also in academic terms and in institutionally organised forms.

Francis' indications on theological reflection

On a number of occasions the Pope has illustrated the aspects he considers most important in developing the thinking aimed at explaining faith. Already in his post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation '*Evangelii gaudium*' (EG), the policy document of his papacy [1], he had pointed out that the service of theologians is "part of the Church's saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology" (EG 133).

To this end, the notion of mercy is fundamental, given that it is at the heart of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The pope has written to the professors of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina saying, "I encourage you to study how the various disciplines — dogma, morality, spirituality, law, and so on — may reflect the centrality of mercy"[2].

Theology –Francis wrote – must be the “expression of a Church which is a “field hospital”, which lives her mission of salvation and healing in the world. Mercy is not just a pastoral attitude but it is the very substance of the Gospel of Jesus [...]. Without mercy our theology, our law, our pastoral care run the risk of collapsing into bureaucratic narrow-mindedness or ideology, which by their nature seeks to domesticate the mystery. Understanding theology is understanding God, who is Love.” [3]. In the Gospels we see that Jesus is always careful to fulfil the meaning of the precepts of divine law according to a logic that promotes all that is human, avoiding all that can injure the dignity of the person: controversies on the Sabbath and on the priority of mercy in respect of sacrifices are eloquent examples of this (see Mt 12,7)[4]. According to his understanding mercy is not “a surrogate of the truth and of justice, but is a condition through which to find them”[5].

Furthermore, to be a part of the Church’s evangelising mission, theology must not be separated from pastoral care or, even worse, opposed to it [6]. In order to go in this direction it is essential to be in touch with the experiences believers are immersed in in their everyday lives. Two needs arise from this: on the one hand, to be aware of the actual situations in which people live their lives, above all those who live in various types of peripheries, and therefore in situations of greater vulnerability; on the other, to acquire the ability to communicate in an understandable manner with interlocutors of different cultures, in a variety of places and times.

These two needs present several common traits: to go beyond the perimeter of a “desk” so as to move towards the frontiers [7]; to avail oneself not only of one’s albeit essential personal experience but also of the results of the sciences that systematically explore the experienced social and economic dynamics in which our contemporaries are involved; to forge

new languages that will make it possible to interact with different cultures.

The dimensions and meaning of dialogue

Francis' insistence on dialogue can be considered in this light. To be possible, it requires first and foremost exercising "a way of thinking that is not grasping, but welcoming", that does not give in "to the illusion of definitiveness and perfection, but that sees itself as open, incomplete, restive" [8]. This requires a mindset and an attitude to relationships that need learning and training: "Dialogue" is not a magic formula, but theology is certainly aided in its renewal when it adopts it seriously [...] Theology students should be educated in dialogue" [9].

This is a very demanding goal that entails a review of the ecclesiastic curricula and "cultural laboratory" experiences [10] that need to link the different disciplines, encouraging a mutual enrichment in terms of both content and method. We feel we can indicate three fronts on which this dialogue may develop.

The first concerns the knowledge provided by natural and social sciences. It is necessary to listen, adopting a boldly open attitude towards the contributions these sciences can offer and operating a knowledgeable discernment so as to make use of the resources that contemporary thinking places make available to us. The Church has always proceeded in this style. There have been tensions and conflicts that need to be tackled in an evangelical style, but she has always avoided becoming sclerotized "on an anachronistic conceptual apparatus, incapable of adequately interacting with transformations"[11].

Today we are called upon in particular to critically ask ourselves questions about our notions "of nature and artifice, conditioning and liberty, means and ends, generated by the new culture of action typical of the technological era. We are called to place ourselves on the pathway resolutely chosen by Vatican

Council II, that urges for renewal of the theological disciplines and a critical reflection on the relationship between the Christian faith and moral action (see *Optatam totius*, 16)”[12].

For dialogue to be truly trans-disciplinary, it is necessary to overcome the simple juxtaposition of the cognitive content of the single disciplines, or the naive importing in to theological speech of words from other types of knowledge [13]. The meanings of the notions that are used, in fact, depend on the conceptual equipment and processes used to process them. There is a need for an endeavour to critically examine the relevant categories to tackle questions that require contributions from different theoretical horizons.

The other two fronts for dialogue concern the encounter between cultures and religions. They are closely connected. Only within the framework of an authentic “culture of encounter” (EG 220) will it be possible to understand a decision to “adopt the culture of dialogue as a pathway; common cooperation as conduct; mutual knowledge as method and criterion” [14]. Dialogue is presented here not as an option but as a founding element for every religious faith, in a spirit of fraternity. It requires the content of knowledge and relationship modes to be considered equally important.

And this does not apply only to those the Church’s mission speaks to, but also to her own internal life, as emerges from the concept of “missionary synodality”[15]: there is a continuity in the way the Church proceeds in the quality of the relationships she promotes – organising them also institutionally – and the message she is called to announce. It is an appeal to continuous conversion so that the Church can become increasingly welcoming and open to participation in all her dimensions.

After all, it is fair to say that the Holy Scriptures themselves were formed according to a dialogue-based procedure. They are the result of mutual exchanges between the different traditions the

chosen people encountered not only in the neighbouring cultures, but also amongst themselves, as the biblical texts clearly confirm [16]. The understanding experience develops through an unceasing dynamic involving recognition and critical acceptance of the indication of goodness present in real historical situations, within which the encounter with and knowledge of God, who operates through events, is also mediated. It is a process that never moves in one single direction but is multi-directional, truly trans-cultural.

Those dynamics are no different from current ones: the interaction with contemporary thinking – including its scientific-technological expressions – and with the different cultures and religious traditions makes possible unexpected intuitions and new elements in theological language. It is an activity of the utmost importance if one is to study in depth not only the intelligence of faith, but also the interpretation of the world, of life and the actions of which faith itself is the yeast, facilitating communication with the men and women of our times.

Quoting Michel de Certeau, an author who is very dear to him, the Pope mentions that faith-related questions should be answered taking also into account their wording, given that they are ones through which men and women in a given society experience and interpret the world [17]. It is necessary not to become sclerotized on utterances that can no longer correctly express the truth of God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ's Gospel [18]. And, given the many different ways of being Christian in time and geographical-cultural environments, theology is required to discern with care and reflect on the meaning of faith in every specific situation, understanding the reasons for every way of being Christian [19].

This perspective is possible only if one admits that no single theological formulation can cover the wealth of the reality of faith that it intends to express and that opening up every

utterance to possible subsequent enrichment and updates does not affect its validity [20]. Different formulations can indicate the same inexhaustible reality of faith in a plurality of versions. But it is necessary for each of them, in their diversity, to be in a dialogue with the others, without any monolithic fundamentalism, expressing themselves as different faces of a single polyhedron, that has as its backdrop the well known principle: “reality is superior to the idea”[21].

The creation of the new John Paul II Theological Institute

The journey made by the John Paul II Theological Institute is to be viewed precisely in this perspective. It has recently been at the core of lively discussions, not always supported by adequate information about the actual state of affairs. First of all let us remember that with the “Motu proprio” *Summa familiae cura* (September 8th, 2017) – that followed the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, that collected the fruits of two previous Synodal Assemblies (the extraordinary one of 2014 and the ordinary one of 2015) – Pope Francis created a new Institute, called the “John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences”. Therefore the previous Institute, established by the apostolic constitution *Magnum matrimonii sacramentum* (October 7th, 1982), has been abolished.

The objective pursued by this decision is to give the journey travelled so far renewed momentum. It began almost 40 years ago thanks to Saint John Paul II’s sound intuition: the centrality of the family in the construction of the social fabric and in educating to a human coexistence truly respectful of life and people’s dignity, in an evangelical perspective.

The depth of the changes that have taken place over recent decades had brought to the forefront the need for a new beginning, “broadening its field of interest, both in relation to the new dimensions of the pastoral task and of the ecclesial

mission, and with reference to developments in the human sciences and in anthropological culture in a field so fundamental for the culture of life”[22].

The “*Motu proprio*” had also indicated that new Statutes would be defined (art. 5). Approved by the Holy See, with the relevant plan of studies, they came into force on July 18th, 2019. They took two years to draft, with the involvement of academic leaders – the grand chancellor Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, and the dean, Msgr. Pierangelo Sequeri – and the teaching staff, as well as the many international sessions linked to the central Institute. The texts were developed in cooperation with the Holy See’s competent bodies. In particular, the Congregation for Catholic Education provided valuable advice thanks to its specific competence in the field of education. But important synergies were also developed with the Dicastery for the Lay, the Family and Life and with the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Plan of studies: a “cultural laboratory”

The new plan of studies is structured in two main areas: theological-pastoral and anthropological-cultural. The former involves an in-depth study of the theology of the Christian form of faith, of community ecclesiology the evangelical mission, of the anthropology of human love and theological, of the global theological ethics of life, of spirituality and the transmission of faith in the secular city”[23].

The second area more directly meets the needs for renewal and dialogue with contemporary thinking, and substantially introduces the human sciences’ perspective. These include disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics and comparative law. This means adopting the cognitive tools for an analysis of the community’s political and technological transformations and the role of family institutions in educating individuals, taking into account the important function of

intermediate social bodies in the equilibria of human coexistence, in emotional and ethical terms.

The courses' structure makes it possible to obtain second cycle (Licentiate) and third cycle qualifications (PhD). The educational offer does not therefore envisage any teaching already provided in the first cycle, which is taken for granted. The fundamental subjects that have been considered useful to maintain are organised according to the Institute's thematic and academic specificity: to provide just a few examples, we might mention Christian Ecclesiology and family community, Moral theology of love and family, Theology of the sacrament of marriage.

Several supplementary courses will be offered thanks to specialists invited to the Institute or accredited university institutions, in particular the Pontifical Lateran University, with which a privileged link exists. The curricula have been reorganised so as to obtain recognition of qualifications according to Canon Law and fully become a part of the "Bologna process", thus ensuring a sounder position for the Institute at international level.

Thanks to an increase in teaching staff it will be possible to cover the main subjects and also promote a better-structured dialogue between the different disciplines and theological perspectives. The aim is to facilitate the presence of voices that can provide a comprehensive interpretation of the magisterium, including recent teachings [24].

Indeed, we know that topics concerning family life are the object of heated debates that at times have not helped believers develop a balanced opinion on the positions of the magisterium, or grow in a spirit of communion, also because arguments are often stretched and there is undue pressure from the media. In particular, it is a matter of developing interpretations that will show the synergy and complementarity of documents that are

too often read as if juxtaposed or even contradictory, without analysing in depth the ideas that would help recognise the connections, convergences and mutual enrichment [25].

Therefore, it is in the spirit of the above-mentioned “cultural laboratory” that an increase in teaching staff has been envisaged, although it will include most of its previous members. In a few cases, in the new structure, academic positions that were previously present have not be assigned. The criteria underlying this decision are the ones mentioned above. But there is always full compliance with Canon Law provisions that express the new Institute’s nature as an “ecclesiastic” academy, and with the General Regulations of the Roman Curia that govern it and which, in fact, already applied to the previous Institute.

The entire structure of the John Paul II Theological Institute thus expresses a commitment to better fulfil pope Francis’ insistent request to “have *light and flexible structures* that express the priority given to welcoming and dialogue, to inter- and trans-disciplinary work and networking. The statutes, the internal organization, the method of teaching, the program of studies should reflect the physiognomy of the Church “which goes forth”.”[26].

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[1]. See EG 25.

[2]. Francis, Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the “Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina” on the Faculty of Theology’s 100th anniversary, 3 March 2015, on w2.vatican.va (where it also possible to find other speeches by the Pope quoted further down). It is a line already followed by previous Popes, as one can tell even with a brief look at the titles of their magisterium speeches, starting with Pius XI, who wrote the *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928), and above all John XXIII, who exhorted the Church to give precedence to “the medicine of mercy rather than that of strictness” (Opening Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on 11 October 1962), to the encyclical *Dives in misericordia* by Saint John Paul II to those by Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* and *Caritas in veritate*.

[3]. “First of all, it is necessary to *start from the Gospel of mercy*, from the proclamation made by Jesus himself and from the original contexts of evangelization. Theology is born amidst specific human beings, who have encountered the gaze and heart of God who seeks them with merciful love. Doing theology is also an act of mercy.” (Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Southern Italy, 21 June 2019).

[4]. See G. Ferretti, *Il criterio misericordia. Sfide per la teologia e la prassi della Chiesa*, Brescia, Queriniana, 2017.

[5]. R. Cantalamessa, “*Il valore politico della misericordia*”, in Oss. Rom., 30 March 2008, quoted by P. Coda in “*La Chiesa è il Vangelo. Alle sorgenti della teologia di papa Francesco*”, Vatican City, Libr. Ed. Vaticana, 2017, 111.

[6]. See Pope Francis, Video-message to participants in an International Theological Conference held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, 1 September 2015.

[7]. “Your place for reflection is the frontier. Do not fall into the temptation to embellish, to add fragrance, to adjust them to some degree and domesticate them. Even good theologians, like good shepherds, have the odour of the people and of the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine onto the wounds of mankind.” (Pope Francis, Letter to the Grand Chancellor..., cit.).

[8]. P. Coda, “*La Chiesa è il Vangelo*”..., cit., 75 s.

- [9]. Francis, Address to the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Southern Italy, cit.
- [10]. Id., *Veritatis gaudium*, no. 3.
- [11]. Id., Address to the 25th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 25 February 2009.
- [12]. Ivi.
- [13]. See Id., *Veritatis gaudium*, no. 4c.
- [14]. Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019), signed by Pope Francis and the Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb.
- [15]. Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, nos. 206-207; see Synod of Bishops; Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. Final Document, Vatican City, Libr. Ed. Vaticana, 2018, nosn. 119-127.
- [16]. See Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Bible and Morality, Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct, Vatican City, Libr. Ed. Vaticana, 2008, in particular no. 4. On the ethical aspects of dialogue, cfr D. Abignente – S. Bastianel, *Le vie del bene. Oggettività, storicità, intersoggettività*, Trapani, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2009, 51-95.
- [17]. See Pope Francis, Message to International Congress of Theology..., cit.
- [18]. “There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian.” (EG 41).
- [19]. “All this leads us to reflect on the fact that Christians in Argentina today are not the Christians in Argentina 100 years ago. In India and in Canada people are not Christian in the same way they are in Rome. That is why it is the main task of the theologian to discern, to ponder: what does it mean to be Christian today, “in the here and now”? How does that river flow from the source to irrigate these lands today and become visible

and habitable?” (Pope Francis, Video Message to International Congress of Theology..., cit.).

[20]. See G. Lafont, Short essay on the times of Pope Francis, Bologna, EDB, 2017.

[21]. See EG 231, in which the Pope also emphasises the need for “angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom.”

[22]. Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Summa familiae cura*, 8 September 2017.

[23]. P. Sequeri, “*Tra fede e realtà*”, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 19 July 2019, 7.

[24]. See Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Southern Italy, in which the Pope states, “The renewal of schools of theology comes about through the practice of discernment and through a *dialogical way of proceeding* capable of creating a corresponding spiritual environment and intellectual practice. [...] A dialogue capable of integrating the living criterion of Jesus’ Paschal Mystery with that of analogy, which discovers connections, signs, and theological references in reality, in creation and in history.”

[25]. See Ch. Schönborn, “Préface”, in A. Thomasset – J.-M. Garrigues, *Une morale souple, mais non sans boussole. Répondre aux doutes des quatre cardinaux à propos d’Amoris laetitia*, Paris, Cerf, 2017, 12. For an in-depth analysis on a number of controversial points, see *ivi*, 66-100.

[26]. Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Southern Italy, cit.

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